Multiculturalism and the Problem that White-Filipino Americans Pose to a Post-Racial America

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Introduction

Despite the gruesome yet intimate relationship that the United States has imposed on the Philippines for over a century, many Americans—including Filipino Americans—remain unaware of this violent connection that continues to shape the lives of Filipino Americans today. This ignorance has resulted from the erasure of Filipino/Filipino American history from the American education system and from American society overall, which is something biracial Filipino American author Brian Ascalon Roley can personally attest to. Noting the power of American amnesia, Roley observes, "Where I live now, in California, there are about one million of both [Filipino and Chinese Americans], and though the Chinese are very visible … by contrast, Filipinos are rarely noticed. Few Americans know that the Philippines used to be a U.S. colony; I was never taught about our common history in high school, though we spent two weeks on British Colonialism in India" (Brainard 104). Roley exposes the silence that surrounds the Filipino American experience and how this works to the detriment of all Americans by keeping them in the dark about America's colonization of the Philippines. This ignorance particularly affects Filipino Americans since they are prevented from perceiving the true nature of their relationship to the U.S., which robs them of the ability to understand their migration to the U.S. and situate themselves within U.S. history.

The confusion resulting from this silence is exacerbated when we consider the existence of White-Filipino Americans who find themselves at a racial crossroads and may need more historical context to understand some of the conflicts that could arise when White and Filipino identities collide. Roley has stepped up to fill this void in the American consciousness, using literary fiction to address the paradoxes and awkwardness of the mixed-race experience by exploring the peculiar position of White-Filipino Americans. What makes the White-Filipino

identity so controversial is the inequality that defines the relationship between these two identities, which derives from the history of the U.S. bludgeoning the Philippines into compliance with its abusive capitalist system. As a result, White-Filipino Americans are placed in an impossible position since they are forced to navigate between two identities that are bound by the violence of U.S. colonization. Roley expertly captures the identity crisis that biracial White-Filipino Americans endure in his works *American Son* (2001) and *The Last Mistress of Jose Rizal: Stories* (2016), portraying the experiences of two Filipina sisters and their White-Filipino families as they endure the difficulties of being Filipino in America while attempting to reconcile the disparate views of their Filipino and White relatives.

American Son focuses on a White-Filipino family of four—Ika, a Filipina; Russ, a White U.S. veteran; and their two multiracial children, Tomas (older) and Gabe (younger)—and depicts the struggles that the two sons face as they pursue different racial identities while dealing with the emotional baggage that each of their parents carries. Neither parent does much to help their sons through their growing pains: Russ has recently left the family, hurling racial insults at his wife and sons on the way out; meanwhile, Ika has failed to provide Tomas and Gabe with a Filipino community that they can be proud of due to her internalized shame of being Filipino. Consequently, Tomas and Gabe are left to seek out communities for themselves as each brother chooses a different path that leads to unhealthy outcomes. Tomas fashions himself into a Mexican gangster, adopting the macho masculinity that comes with this racial identity as he sells attack dogs to celebrities in order to provide for his impoverished mother. Gabe, on the other hand, plays the role of the 'good child,' attending a White and wealthy Catholic school and even passing as White. This ability to pass compels Gabe to claim a White identity and reject his Filipino identity, which culminates in him denying his connection to his brown mother when a

truck driver fails to immediately recognize their mother-son relationship. Roley goes on to explore the pain that arises from attempting to reconcile these positions of 'White' and 'Filipino' as both brothers distance themselves from a Filipino identity and lean toward another identity that is grounded in macho masculinity and violence.

Ika's family's history bleeds over into Roley's more recent book *The Last Mistress of Jose Rizal*, as he depicts in more detail the broken relationship between Russ and Ika and their children while branching out to include Ika's sister, Dina, and her own White-Filipino family's struggles with multiracial identity. Roley begins the collection with a story, *Old Man*, about Ika's family that is told from the viewpoint of Tomas, who is visiting his now old and worn-down father. Tomas brutally exposes his family's bitterness as he vents his own frustrations at his father for whisking their mother from the Philippines and plunging them into economic woes. Tomas' recollection ends with him turning his back on his father as he leads Gabe downstairs to celebrate the birthday party their mother is throwing for Gabe. Roley then transitions into Dina's familial relations and the struggles she experiences with her brother, Pepe, and her White-Filipino children. For the purpose of this project, I will limit my scope to Roley's short stories that center around Dina's relationship with Pepe and her oldest son, Matt. Roley explores Pepe's past as a soldier who fought for Philippine-American forces during WWII and who now seeks economic opportunities in America. Nevertheless, Pepe struggles with his Filipino identity and the degrading views Americans have of Filipino culture. These struggles come to plague Dina's son, Matt, as he navigates relationships that constantly bring out the antagonism between White and Filipino perspectives. Matt strains his relationship with Dina when he dates a White Jewish girl and then falls for the daughter of their new Filipino maid. Tinged with a history of

colonialism that has produced economic and racial differences, Roley creates a multiracial family tree that contradicts the post-racial American dream of interracial harmony.

For years, Americans have so desperately wanted to believe that they are living in a post-racial society that has moved past some of its worst prejudices and conflicts, and we have often used multiculturalism to support this narrative. Avery F. Gordon and Christopher Newfield note the history of multiculturalism in America and how it ironically supports the colorblind racism that it was intended to combat. Multiculturalism began as a response to White racists' calls for "colorblindness" that were a retaliation against the push for civil rights during the 1970s and 1980s (3). Supporters of colorblindness sought to undermine civil rights proponents by arguing that race was no longer relevant in America, which multiculturalism was designed to counteract. As Gordon and Newfield explain, "Multiculturalism, to the contrary, implied that race is everywhere … If you thought race was a function of economics, multiculturalism told you race is also central to your personal identity. If you let policy talk convince you that race had been taken care of with antidiscrimination statues, multiculturalism reminded you that it constitutes all social relations" (3). Gordon and Newfield recognize the initial benefits of multiculturalism within the context of colorblindness that threatened to convince Americans that race no longer mattered. If White racists want to deny civil rights by denying the existence of race, then it makes sense to vehemently demand that people see race in their everyday lives. However, multiculturalism's proponents began to value the visibility of race so much that they thought simply showing race would be enough to achieve their goal of racial equity. What started as a push for civil rights devolved into a desire to shine the spotlight on certain racial identities, which ironically overshadowed the racial struggles of the past. As Gordon and Newfield explain, "[Multiculturalism] didn't seem very antiracist, and often left the impression that any discussion

of cultural diversity would render racism insignificant. It was ambiguous about the inheritance and ongoing presence of histories of oppression. It had the air of pleading for a clean start" (3). For Gordon and Newfield, the main problem with multiculturalism is that it places an emphasis on race as cultural identity while glossing over the power structures behind race that stem from histories of colonial oppression. Multiculturalism then unintentionally threatens to erase the histories and structures that have produced racial differences, which makes viewing race purely as identity a shortsighted act.

At first glance, Roley appears to desire the visibility of certain racial identities as the end goal since he centers his novel *American Son* around the identity crises that both brothers face. As Roley explains, "They have identity crises, wishing to be at turns White or Mexican; my notion followed from the idea that being invisible, they felt compelled to look elsewhere for a way of presenting themselves to other Americans, and also that their mother was colonialized, ashamed of being Filipina" (Brainard 104). While Roley mentions cultural identity and awareness of minority identities, he also notes something very peculiar at the end of his statement—"that their mother was colonialized, ashamed of being Filipina." I would like to shift attention towards this last detail since it moves beyond merely placing racial identities in the spotlight and references the power dynamics that often lie in the shadows. The shame felt towards a Filipino/a identity stems from a feeling of being less, which is a product of a complex relationship between the Philippines and the United States that is marked by colonization, genocide, and cultural oppression. While race is very much part of one's identity and should not be ignored, we cannot afford to ignore that race is also very much a product of colonial forces and structures of oppression. In fact, we can actually develop a more nuanced and complex understanding of Roley's characters on an individual level by acknowledging the structural

meanings that mediate each character's relationship to their racial identity and to others' racial identities. By broadening our views to include differences in status and power between racial identities, I argue that multiculturalism and cultural awareness merely raise the self-esteem of minority groups while doing nothing to challenge the structural impediments that keep non-Whites in lower positions of the racial hierarchy. By shedding light on the White-Filipino experience and the tensions that define it, Roley rejects the American belief in a post-racial society where people can disregard racial conflicts as things of the past, choosing instead to peel off the bandages of old racial wounds and let them bleed onto the pages of his writing. Roley doesn't try to solve the race problem; instead, he explores how his characters react to the tearing open of these wounds as they seek out loud, macho masculine personas and a mythical untouched 'Filipino' identity to help them deal with the pain.

White-Filipino Identity and the Costs of Using Violence to Pursue Racial Equity

Much of the conflict in *American Son* broils beneath the surface of Brian Ascalon Roley's writing; yet, tension courses through all the insults, all the microaggressions, all the unhealed scars that threaten to burst open as Roley's protagonists, Tomas and Gabe, are forced to confront the distance between their White and Filipino backgrounds as they attempt to navigate their tumultuous racial existence. Despite the racial ambiguity that both brothers must learn to navigate, racial lines within their family remain dangerously sharp and split the family in two since their Filipina mother, Ika, and White ex-soldier father, Russ, are unable to reconcile the disparities between their cultural and racial backgrounds. While the racial identities that Tomas and Gabe pursue in response to this schism lead them down separate and distinct paths, the isolation and confusion that both brothers endure can ultimately be traced back to the lack of support and community that both parents fail to offer them. Framed within the historical context

of colonial violence enacted by the United States on the Philippines, the relationship between Ika and Russ is stained with a bloody and oppressive history that diminishes Filipino identity and places Tomas and Gabe in a position where they must navigate antagonistic identities, compelling the brothers to not only seek out other racial identities but also masculine identities that compensate for their sense of shame and powerlessness as multiracial Asian Americans.

Russ—an ex-U.S. soldier who served in the Philippines—initiates the downward spiral of the family by degrading his Filipina wife, alienating his boys from their White identity and leaving them feeling ashamed of their Filipino identity as he invokes a White imperial tradition that has become an inseparable part of Filipino history. During one of his drunken rampages, Russ becomes annoyed when Tomas threatens retaliation, and Gabe relays the following insults that Russ spews: "He only married her because he wanted someone meek and obedient, but had been fooled because she came with a nagging extended family. He said he never intended to come back to us permanently anyway and only wanted to sleep with her, and now he had gotten what he wanted" (Roley, *American Son* 24). While one may chalk this passage up to mere verbal abuse, there is something more sinister lurking beneath the surface of these statements. Russ makes some appalling assumptions about Ika—that she's "meek and obedient" and will submit to his desires, and that he can "sleep with her" whenever he feels like it. These assumptions take on greater consequences when we note the unequal White-Brown dynamic at play in this relationship that is a result of the colonial and military context in which White-Filipino relationships have often taken place.

Maria Root sheds light on the military context that is the defining reason for the United States' presence in the Philippines to this day. As she asserts, "The presence of American military in the Pacific, specifically with military bases in the Philippines during World War II,

the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and onward, guaranteed there would be interracial mixing and, subsequently, children" (84-5). The mixing of Filipinos and Whites has occurred within the context of a spreading U.S. war machine that has colonized the Philippines and used the islands as a launching point into other Asian countries. In a way, the relationship between Russ and Ika stands as a microcosm of the overall relationship between the Philippines and the United States in which White colonizers are able to bully their Filipino subjects, and Russ certainly believes that he has this power over Ika. Root captures the unequal dynamic between White men and Filipina women, explaining, "International marriages still occur, largely through military contact and the mail-order bride business. Each year, thousands of women leave the Philippines in search of better economic opportunities than the local economy offers … Denigrating stereotypes of Filipinas as exotic, childlike, subservient, and gold-digging maintain an attitude that dismisses the validity of a majority of these relationships" (85). Root connects the U.S. military conquest of the Philippines with the economic disparity between the two nations, revealing how Filipina women are pressured to marry White men since they view the Philippines in contrast to the opportunity that the U.S. represents for them. White U.S. soldiers like Russ then view themselves as powerful figures who hold a great deal of status and leverage over their vulnerable Filipino counterparts, enabling them to capitalize on a situation in which Filipina women may be desperate to escape their economically deprived situation. Although Ika herself is not a mail-order bride, she gets caught in this military context, which disparages her as just another Filipina woman giving in to the appeal of a better life that the White man symbolizes for many Filipinas.

Nothing reveals the power disparity between the United States and the Philippines more than the migration of Filipinos to America, and the business of mail-order brides encapsulates this narrative of White superiority that pervades both the U.S. and the Philippines. Maria P.P.

Root explores the problems that arise when we look closely at the motives behind Filipina wives traveling to the United States to take White husbands. As she explains, "What is perceived as beautiful is fair skinned, high nosed, *mestiza*, and blue eyed. America is the land of milk and honey. Marrying a white American can lend Filipino women a sense of status and power, to the extent that when they look at their brown skin, they see white" (123). The movement of Filipinas to the U.S., as Root points out, reflects a preference towards White men that stems from false beliefs about the superiority of Whiteness but nevertheless remains anchored in the minds of Filipinos. This preference is hardly a preference, however, as Root exposes the power relations behind the White advantage, noting, "Internalized colonization influences the Filipino women's preference for American men. Almost 400 years under two Western colonial powers, the ubiquitous presence of U.S. military men, and Hollywood have impressed on their consciousness a romanticized image of America and the American man" (123). The Filipina interest in White men is grounded in a history of violence, a history in which America has imposed its will on Filipinos and contorted the Filipino consciousness to fit the will of the White American war machine. With these factors in mind, the relationship between Russ and Ika becomes skewed within the context of grossly unbalanced power as Russ represents the White American man who operates under the assumption that he will always get his way since Whites are used to being looked up to from their subdued Filipino subjects. This power imbalance then influences the behavior and attitudes of Ika since she develops a loathing towards her brown skin and her Filipino background, weakening her and her family's connection to the Philippines.

Ika displays a clear prejudice towards her Filipino identity as she attempts to distance herself from the Philippines, reflecting an internalized colonial identity that she unfortunately passes on to her sons. Recalling a trip that he, Tomas, and Ika take to the Philippines, Gabe

observes his mother's revulsion of the place and the people as he narrates, "She complained about the heat and smelly showers, even the ones in Uncle Betino's Forbes Park mansion … She pushed the beds away from the wall so insects would not crawl onto the sheets. She warned us not to eat unpackaged food from local stores, and washed her hands after touching shopkeepers at the markets" (*American Son* 32). Ika cannot hide her disgust of the Philippines, which stands as more of a concept to her rather than a place. She displays a deep distrust in the local stores and shopkeepers, implying that they are unclean by washing her hands and taking other precautions. This feeling of uncleanliness comes to characterize the idea of 'Philippines' for Ika since she even looks down on the wealthy home of her brother Betino. Wealth in the Philippines can never impress her because she has already associated 'Philippines' with 'poor' and 'dirty.' This disparaging view of her home country reflects White views of Filipinos and signals that Ika has fallen victim to the process of what E.J.R. David calls "internalized colonialism." Elaborating on this idea of internalized colonialism, David cites the work of Frantz Fanon as he explains, "Psychiatrist Fanon (1965) argued that the sustained denigration and inhumane treatments that the colonized are subjected to under colonialism often lead to self-doubt, identity confusion, and feelings of inferiority among the colonized" (56). For David, the violence with which colonialism imposes itself on its subjects leaves scars beneath the surface of one's skin that alter the psychological landscape of each colonized individual. The colonized come to see themselves as less because they are constantly humbled, whether it be through words or brute force. As a result, colonial policies may officially end, but the damaged mentalities that develop from these encounters are passed down from generation to generation as the colonized pick up signs that tell them they are still less than their White oppressors. While Ika follows this pattern in many ways by internalizing and projecting the White gaze onto the Philippines for her boys to see, there is

another way to read her refusal to proudly claim a Filipino identity—one that grants her autonomy and an escape from typical calls for representation that fuel the violent masculinity that Gabe and Tomas come to embrace.

Ika's rejection of her Filipino identity can also be read as an act of agency in which Ika escapes restrictive patterns that develop out of a narrative arc that requires multiracial individuals the desire to be seen. In his book *The Work of Mothering*, Harrod Suarez argues for the alternative model that Ika provides in contrast to her sons' desire to have their Filipino identity seen and respected. As Suarez explains, "It is their mother [Ika] whose silence emerges as the novel's most potent force, deployed as an act that thwarts not just the conclusion to a coming-of-age tale but also and especially the will to speech and visibility that often structures racial identity politics" (121). For Suarez, there is an obvious pattern to stories that discuss erasure and the need to have oneself be understood: the character(s) desperately works to place themselves in the vision of others, believing that being seen will solve their identity issues. Implied by this narrative is the belief that one can only grow to understand themselves if they make noise. Yet Ika decides not to rely on the vision of others to validate her own existence, which frees her from the power struggles that inevitably result from people asserting their identities against invisibility. This silence takes on a power of its own as she quietly asserts her presence, which is most apparent when Gabe tells a stranger that Ika is the family maid—a scene that I will go into in more detail later—and then tries to apologize to his mother as they sit in a hotel room. As Gabe relates, "I lift my arm and wrap it awkwardly over her shoulder, and though she does not pull back, neither does she respond. I let it stay there for a moment, limp like a fish" (*American Son* 129). Instead of lashing out and condemning Gabe for humiliating her, she hits Gabe harder not by delivering blows but by holding back the affection and forgiveness a son is used to

receiving from his mother. Ika refuses to get loud and intimidate Gabe; yet, she communicates her pain by telling Gabe in her own quiet way that she is giving up on him. While she continues to fill the role of the quiet Filipina, she has found a way to use this role to let others feel her absence as a consequence of their attempts to erase her from view. As Suarez elaborates, "She refuses the logic of representation on the grounds that it is too intimately linked to the exercise of racial, gender, and sexual authority, and to the practices of a gendered and sexualized national belonging" (122). Suarez shows us that what comes across as passive and silent can also stand as an act of active defiance as Ika avoids taking on a loud, powerful persona that demands control and visibility in order to feel validated. Instead she remains silent, providing space for those who are aware enough to reflect on what happens when they try to assert themselves at the expense of others. Ika then stands as a contrast to her two sons who decide to make noise in order to be heard and seen, which leads them to adopt masculine personas that hurt more than help them.

Reacting to the instability and shame that tarnish his White/Filipino identity, Tomas turns to a Mexican identity that simultaneously empowers him with a renewed sense of agency and infects him with a damaging strain of macho-masculinity. Gabe describes the perplexing path that Tomas takes to construct a racial identity for himself within the environment of their school, as Gabe explains, "Tomas had gone there first and he had passed as a white surfer … Then he began hanging out with Mexicans, who are tougher … If anyone tried calling him an Asian he beat them up, and he started taunting these Korean kids who could barely speak English" (Roley, *American Son* 30). Tomas noticeably refrains from choosing either a White or Asian identity, opting instead to go with the Mexican identity that carries masculine connotations. We can view this choice as an alternative to the degrading views that Asian Americans endure as well as the privilege that Whites flaunt since they have the luxury of believing that they own this country.

Eleanor Ty depicts the dilemma that Tomas faces by starting with the disconnect that would result if Tomas were to embrace a White identity. As Ty asserts, "The protagonists reveal how they become abject others of the dominant culture that invites them to be part of the nation yet refuses to accord them the same privileges as white Americans" (121). Although Tomas initially passes as White, he cannot deny his mixed identity and the uncertainties that come with this existence. Those who fully identify as White never have to question their identity and can feel confident occupying a space that they feel entitled to. No matter how hard he wants the sense of belonging and entitlement that comes with this Whiteness, Tomas simply doesn't feel comfortable choosing a White identity since he can never fully ignore his Filipino background.

Realizing that he doesn't have the privilege of feeling entitled to a White identity, Tomas comes to reject the dominant identity that he can never put on with pride, stranding himself since he refuses to accept his Filipino identity as well. Gabe sheds light on the disparity between the Filipino and White identities in his family by drawing a dichotomy between him and his brother and their cousin, setting up a White-Filipino binary in the process. Noting the stark contrast between them and their cousin, Matt, Gabe observes, "Though Matt is half Filipino like us, he dresses like the rich white kids he went to school with. I remember in the eighties he wore a pink Polo shirt, though now he is in a fashionable dark brown suede leather coat with seventies style lapels and huge drooping buttons, Doc Martens, and black pants. His school was only a mile away from ours. It is strange how differently we turned out" (Roley, *American Son* 193). Using Matt as a foil to Tomas, Roley (via Gabe) demonstrates the vast differences between Whiteness and Filipino-ness, the biggest difference being wealth, which Matt displays through his nice clothes and nicer education that he attained alongside "rich white kids." His inability to access

the wealth and education that Matt could influences Tomas' identity formation and pushes him away from the White identity that he can never have.

On the other hand, he refuses his Filipino identity for the negative associations attached to it. Tomas receives negative signals concerning his Filipino identity from Ika, as Gabe relates, "She cannot understand why if he wants to be something he is not he does not at least try to look white" (Roley, *American Son* 15). Tomas' mother clearly implies a hierarchy in which it is better to be White than to be Filipino; at least, Whiteness is valued much more than Filipino-ness. In general, the Filipino identity is stigmatized for its lack of resources and the impoverished state of many Filipino individuals. As Ty reveals, "Seeing himself through the gaze of a dominant culture that views him as servile, feminized, and different, Tomas is ashamed of being identified as a Filipino American" (124). There are various associations that we need to unpack in this analysis, including the perception of Filipinos as servants. It is because of this association between Filipinos and servitude that feminine connotations become tied to the Filipino identity since this position suggests a vulnerability that comes with poverty and powerlessness. Betino sheds light on the menial labor that many Filipinos are forced to perform abroad, as he explains, "Perhaps some people in other countries may have a low estimation of Filipinos; may I suggest that this is inaccurate, a misperception based on seeing the many poor, uneducated domestic laborers and bar girls who must live abroad to earn money, as you [Ika] yourself should well know" (*American Son* 134). Because of the history of imperialism that robbed the Philippines of its resources, many Filipinos are forced to look elsewhere for higher-paying work, and others ignorantly shame Filipinos for constantly occupying these lower positions. Tomas is painfully aware of these economic assumptions that cling to his Filipino identity, so he vehemently pushes away his Filipino-ness in order to claim a more powerful and respected identity. The question

then becomes what enables Tomas to comfortably choose a Mexican identity and what consequences result from choosing this identity.

Because of the feminization of Asian American men, Tomas is pushed towards adopting a new racial identity in order to combat the emasculation of his Asian identity, which leads him to embrace a masculine identity that does little to heal his wounds. Asian American men have a history of being subjected to notions of inferiority and femininity, largely due to their vulnerable economic positions. As Ty points out, "[Asian males] were also feminized because of their work in laundries, restaurants, and tailor shops. Today, many Asian American men still work in poorly paid 'feminized' service jobs, as houseboys, gardeners, orderlies, laborers, and cleaners in North America and in the Middle East" (125). Ty shows that America genders many of the same menial roles that are often racialized as well, and racial groups can be gendered as a result of this connection between race and gender. The racial hierarchy that raises up Whites depends on the degradation of people of color, including Asian Americans, and this structure has a particularly harmful effect on the masculinity of non-White men—an effect that Tomas tries to resist. Kevin Escudero paints a clear picture of the White patriarchal structures that demean Filipinos and Tomas' aggressive way to counter these forces, as he explains that the opportunity to resist these structures "also functions as an opportunity for Tomas to exert his hyper-masculine identity, a persona that marginalizes Gabe and the mother's ability to act freely and independently … [W]hile this exertion of a hyper-masculine identity serves as a defense for men of color against white male dominance, it does so at the expense of others in the community" (84). Feeling overshadowed by the White identity that he has come to hate, Tomas pushes back in the only way he knows how to: by lashing out and taking up space through violence. In this way, Tomas feels secure enough to exist as a non-White male since he feels as if he's reclaimed some of the

power that the White identity typically hogs. However, this attitude spills over into his relationships with Gabe and Ika as Tomas is unwilling to share the leadership role that he takes as the male head of the family. This masculinity complex strains Tomas' relationship with Gabe when Tomas beats Gabe on one of their excursions in which Gabe shows Tomas up with his crisper Spanish-speaking skills (Roley, *American Son* 53). Although Tomas has built up an armor wall to fend off the effects of White superiority, he unintentionally cuts himself off from his family and responds with violence when they see him in compromising positions. Consequently, Tomas' adopting a macho-masculine Mexican identity yields different kinds of problems for him, even though his choice of a Mexican identity is understandable, given the common history between Filipinos and Mexicans that dates back to the era of Spanish colonization.

Tomas actually has a legitimate case for identifying more with Mexicans than with Asians, considering the awkward position of Filipinos that enables them to relate more with Latinx members than with their Asian counterparts. In his book *The Latinos of Asia*, Anthony Christian Ocampo begins by observing the economic differences between Filipinos and Asians that prevent Filipinos from comfortably identifying as Asian American. As Ocampo explains, "Filipinos work in more than two hundred countries throughout the world, many of which are in East Asia. In countries like Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, Filipino immigrants work primarily as domestic workers, even if they hold a college degree" (81). Ocampo exposes a clear economic divide between Filipinos and other Asians, which has led to the racialization of economic hierarchies in Asian countries where Filipinos may find themselves at the bottom. From these divides can grow resentment and alienation, and the unique history of colonization that Filipinos underwent only contributes to this distance between Filipinos and Asians. Citing

Spanish colonization and the ensuing spread of Catholicism as a major link between Filipino and Latinx cultures, Ocampo asserts, "Filipinos developed what I term *colonial panethnicity*, the sense of shared peoplehood that they implicitly felt or openly invoked, on the basis of the historical, cultural, and social similarities rooted in Spanish colonialism that remain alive in their everyday lives" (86). In other words, the history of being subjected to Spanish colonization is a much stronger connection that Filipinos can share with their Latinx counterparts, whereas no other Asian country has undergone a similar history of such extensive Spanish rule. Tomas' adoption of a Mexican identity no longer comes as much of a surprise; in fact, it is probably the most logical move he could make, considering the similarities between Filipinos and Mexicans that are deeply rooted in Spanish colonization. Nevertheless, even with these similarities, Tomas can never feel quite at home with a Mexican identity despite his desire to fully embrace this identity.

Despite the masculine benefits it offers and its common connection to Spanish colonialism, the Mexican identity fails to provide Tomas with a sense of belonging since he is always falling short of fully embracing this identity. Sliding into a Mexican identity provides immediate short-term benefits for Tomas, who is looking to associate with a "tougher" group of friends (Roley, *American Son* 30). He also finds a link between his Filipino identity and his newly found Mexican identity that forms out of their common history of Spanish colonization, which he reveals through his tattoos as Gabe observes, "The tattoos are mostly gang, Spanish, and old-lady Catholic" (Roley, *American Son* 17). This colonial connection enables Tomas to embrace an identity that helps come across as stronger without making him feel like he is a complete fraud—someone who is putting on a mask that doesn't fit them at all. Nevertheless, Tomas cannot fully embrace a Mexican identity when he is around Mexican people, as evident

when he comes across a Mexican woman who immediately sees through his façade. Tomas is embarrassed by his tattoos in front of the lady, and his inauthenticity is fully exposed when he cannot understand her and Gabe is forced to translate and respond for him (Roley, *American Son* 45-46). While Tomas sees obvious benefits for embracing a Mexican identity, he can never fully do so because he doesn't hold the same cultural knowledge that people of Mexican backgrounds do. Thus, Tomas may find some refuge in taking on a Mexican identity, but he can never claim this identity as his own since he stands out when around people of Mexican backgrounds. Yet Tomas chooses the side with the darker skin and refuses to embrace his White lineage, which makes Gabe's decision all the more intriguing and problematic as he stands on the opposite side of the color line.

In contrast to his older brother, Gabe chooses to pass as White and goes so far as to reject his brown mother, which reflects a potent combo of White washing and Filipino shame that stems from a violent colonial relationship. Having run away and in need of a ride, Gabe comes across a White truckdriver named Stone who, not knowing that Gabe isn't White, bashes various ethnic groups in the L.A. area. During a heart-wrenching moment, Gabe echoes the racist sentiments of Stone as he spews, "The Mexicans come up and it's like they're still roaming all the barrios killing each other down in Mexico. They have their neighborhoods they mark up with graffiti. Like pissing dogs. The new ones have macho mustaches and slick their hair back like they're some kind of Spanish Casanovas, but they're like these short Indian-looking guys. The Cambodians are the worst. It's like their war isn't over yet" (*American Son* 86). What's interesting and horrifying is the way Gabe chooses to navigate his White identity, which involves distancing himself from his Filipino American identity as he adopts the White gaze and perfectly imitates the way Stone sees the world. Gabe's ability to reproduce the thoughts and hateful

sentiments of the White voice leaves one wondering how Gabe knows exactly what to say to please Stone and whether Gabe is merely mimicking the White gaze or actually exposing his own views. Considering his mother's and father's internalized racist notions of Filipinos, it's actually not surprising that Gabe would choose his White identity when faced with the predicament of having to pick a side. Maria Root describes this process as she explains, "Without recognition of the injurious process of racialization, and without positive role models of Filipinos for some persons, young people are subject to using the template by which people struggle with racial identity in a limited, monoracial paradigm. Thus, they may deny their Filipino heritage to be accepted and fit in with their white peers" (87). Root recognizes that the 'Filipino' identity has been constructed as a role for inhabitants of the Philippines to occupy at the bottom of the U.S. racial hierarchy. If this is the only way they learn to view themselves in relation to their Filipino identity, young people are inevitably going to reject this identity or risk falsely accepting themselves as inferior beings. Pushed into a corner by Stone's racist sentiments where he can either support or antagonize Stone, Gabe inevitably gives in to the White man's point of view since he has bought into this construction of the Filipino as 'inferior' and internalized the belief in White supremacy. Receiving support from neither his mother nor his brother, Gabe is left with no reason to embrace his Filipino identity while he receives plenty of reasons to embrace a White identity. Gabe then undergoes a severe case of Whitewashing where he favors his White identity over his Filipino American background, which leads him to reject his brown mother as he develops a deep sense of shame for his Filipino heritage that stems from his White mentality.

Gabe learns to hate his Filipino identity from observing the example of his mother, which ironically leads him to hate his own mother for her brownness and the negative connotations that

her skin carries. Placed in another awkward situation when Stone mistakes his White Aunt Jessica for his mom, Gabe repeats his mistake of complying with Stone's assumptions as he relates, "The man asks me if I see my mother. I have no choice but to point out their booth. He nods approvingly, focusing his gaze on Aunt Jessica with her silk blue scarf wrapped stylishly about her neck. That is some lady, he says, and turns to Mom. But who is that with her?" (*American Son* 115). While Stone's mistake seems innocent enough and is the result of sheer ignorance, there are more insidious undertones that lurk beneath the surface of his assumptions. It's telling that Stone automatically assumes Gabe's aunt to be his mother, which reveals a lot about how Stone views White and brown women in relation to what roles he's used to seeing them play. Gabe picks up on this assumption and the racial implications that come with it as he promptly replies, "That's our maid" (*American Son* 116). Embedded within this statement are far more dangerous assumptions that Gabe is aware of, ones that pertain to socioeconomic status and power (or lack thereof). Gabe knows that to be 'Filipino' means being associated with menial work, with poverty and with being stuck in inferior positions in relation to other groups, especially Whites. In her book *Fantasy Production*, Neferti Tadiar observes these associations between labor and bodies, especially those of Filipinas. Explaining the position of Filipina domestic workers who must work abroad, Neferti reveals that they are viewed as "corporeal objects at the mercy and for the pleasure of those who buy them from the recruitment agency. I say 'buy' because domestic helpers are paid not for a specific skill but rather for their gendered bodies—for their embodiment of a variety of functions and services which they are expected to provide at the beck and call of their employers" (115). Filipinas have become so thoroughly tied to their position as domestic workers that they are now associated with this position and have become the commodity itself. Clients now see Filipinas as embodying these positions and these

skills, confining Filipinas to an inferior position that they can never escape from. Betino accuses Ika of rejecting her Filipino identity because of its associations with poverty, and Gabe has internalized this prejudice to the point where he discards his Filipina mother for the sake of shielding himself from the shame he feels for his Filipino identity. As a result, Gabe takes a different route from Tomas as he embraces his White identity and the privileges that come with it; nevertheless, Gabe and Tomas end up going down the same road together due to the masculinity that unites the brothers.

Despite their individual struggles with their multiracial background, Gabe ends up following Tomas down the same path of violence since the macho masculinity that Tomas promotes offers an empowering alternative for both brothers, as toxic as it is. Closely linked to the brothers' development of a masculine identity is the feminine and passive qualities that they come to associate with being Filipino due to their mother's behavior. In a scene of quiet resentment, Ika is ignored while waiting in the makeup line and despises herself for not speaking up, as Gabe recounts, "It turned out they had passed her number without calling it out and she had been too timid to tell them, so she got a new one. I am still not sure why she was so upset—at the time I thought it was all the waiting, but now I suspect she was upset with herself for not speaking up" (Roley, *American Son* 147). Ika's frustration and internal conflict that stems from this leaves an impression on the boys who take their mother's hurt personally and are determined to not follow in her footsteps. The image of a meek, passive woman becomes conflated with darkness and non-White inferiority, which the brothers attempt to combat by inflicting violence on anyone who tries to belittle their mother. As Eleanor Ty asserts, "This form of self-abnegation and inability to assert oneself embarrasses the boys and leads them to react violently against those whom they perceive are treating them as second-class citizens" (125). Ty emphasizes the

associations between ‘Filipino’ and ‘passive’ and ‘womanly’ that form in the minds of Tomas and Gabe, leading them to stand up for themselves but to do so in ways that are harmful to themselves and to others since they build their new masculine identities on the foundations of dominance and violence.

This toxic masculine development culminates in Tomas and Gabe beating up their White classmate, Ben, whose mother is trying to get their mother to pay for a traffic accident. In an effort to sway Gabe to follow his lead, Tomas baits Ben into revealing racist sentiments towards their mother as he makes fun of Ika, prodding, “The way she hit your mother’s car. I mean they were only going a couple miles an hour. Tomas shakes his head. You know how clueless old oriental ladies like her can get … And the way she talks. Tomas shakes his head even more now. You ever talked to her, Ben? … My brother looks at me now to make sure I’ve been listening” (*American Son* 212-213). Tomas, filled with bitterness and resentment, slowly goes to work on Gabe by tricking Ben into drawing a solid racial line between himself and Gabe. Being poked again and again by small moments of microaggression, Gabe begins to feel solidarity with his brother since he is reminded of how White people look down on their mother and on their Filipino heritage—if White people even notice their Filipino identity. Boiling over into violence, the prods become punches as both brothers brutalize Ben with Gabe taking the lead as he realizes, “A couple of times in the past I have been with a small group of people when someone said a few smart-aleck things about me and Ben laughed even though I was older. But now he is respectful, his head bowed. And though my stomach wrenches, I feel a rush not of anxiety but of confidence. In a scary way I realize I like it” (*American Son* 214-\15). Understanding the racial dynamics at play and his lower position within the hierarchy, Gabe can now revel in his new standing that he has achieved by establishing his dominance over Ben. Unfortunately, Gabe and

Tomas obtain respect by merely flipping the racial hierarchy, which locks them in a mode where they are now the abusers and can only maintain their good position if they continue to use violence. Eleanor Ty sheds light on the wilting growth of Gabe and the self-destructive nature of his actions as she explains, "Gabe slowly succumbs to the gratification of violence and the deadening of emotion as the only viable response to their family's economic immobility and his own sense of powerlessness" (126). Ty establishes the violent backlash from Tomas and Gabe in the face of racial discrimination and economic disparity as a very legitimate reaction, considering the irrationality and inherent unfairness of the hate they receive from their White peers.

The question then becomes what to make of this anti-White violence that Tomas and Gabe embrace as they take on a non-White macho masculinity that returns the antagonism they feel from an inherently biased White society. While Ty points out the violence that hurts Tomas and Gabe and the people around them, the boys also experience a sense of power that they have never felt as White-Filipino Americans. Kevin Escudero notes this power that the brothers desire, as he claims, "Passing is not merely a powerless act in which mixed race people engage to suppress certain aspects of their racial identity, but can also function as a strategy to conveniently exert an entire new identity in itself" (83). Of course, Tomas and Gabe pursue power in the unhealthiest of ways, threatening to disown their Filipino background and seeking to dominate others rather than merely assert themselves. Nevertheless, the effort they exert to avoid being seen as 'inferior' suggests a power struggle in which they must force others to see them differently in order to be treated with more respect. The boys' violent acts are not just about how they're seen but also about how much power they have, which actually becomes crucial in determining one's position in the social and racial hierarchy of the U.S. Thus, Tomas and Gabe's identity formation hinges on how much power they can attain for themselves, and this plays a

part in determining their identities and whether or not they value those identities. Strangely enough, the boys never feel a sense of pride for their Filipino identity or for any identity, ending the narrative on a mental plateau that leaves them with a "deadening of emotion." While Tomas and now Gabe feel resentment towards their White identity, they don't exactly claim their Filipino identity due to their mother's shame and passiveness. To further explore this question, we must confront Roley's newer book as he continues to depict the strange and tumultuous family dynamics between Tomas, Gabe, Ika, and Russ while still finding a way to leave readers with more questions than answers regarding the boys' racial associations.

Drawing the Line in a House Divided to Make Space for the Filipino Identity

The tension that courses throughout *American Son* carries over into Roley's more recent novel, as we experience the conflict between Russ and Ika during their earlier days when the hurt between them is beginning to blossom. *The Last Mistress of Jose Rizal* is a collection of short stories that takes a closer look at the tensions of Ika's family before transitioning into tales of her sister, Dina, and her own White-Filipino family. The short story "Old Man" depicts in more depth the power struggle between Ika and Russ as neither is able to bridge the gap between their racial backgrounds and strike a balance for their kids to take pride in. Because of their inability to compromise, Russ and Ika's love for their kids turns into a tug-of-war match as both attempt to leave their mark on their children and express affection in their own ways. Although the fault lies with the parents for failing to provide Tomas and Gabe with an environment that they can feel comfortable in, the disparity between the parents' backgrounds already sets up the family for difficulties ahead. The inequality between a Filipino and White identity shatters the typical neutrality that comes with both parents sharing the children since compromise often means suppressing their Filipino identity for Ika, Tomas, and Gabe. Because of the colonial framework

that still defines the relationship between Ika and Russ, the family becomes the site of a power struggle in which Gabe and Tomas are increasingly pressured to choose one parent over the other as they attempt to resist the U.S. influence that threatens to smother their Filipino background at the expense of creating a rift between them and their White father.

As Tomas goes deeper and deeper into the depths of his family history, he reveals a clearly unequal relationship between his White military father and Filipina mother since their Filipino identity is often sacrificed for the sake of 'compromise' in this relationship. Tomas expresses bitterness over his mother's decision to choose his father, considering how much she had as a respected Filipina and how little Russ offered her in return. As Tomas explains, "She was a beauty admired for her humble shyness and unusually quiet tongue … In the end, Nanay Ika married this American soldier, my dad, and now my grandmother was routinely taken for a Mexican wetback at the bus stop, we couldn't even get a credit card, and nobody around here has heard of Jose Rizal or could give a fuck about Inay's family name" (Roley, *Last Mistress* 24). Ika grew up with strong social capital, having the privilege of associating herself with the name of Jose Rizal, a national hero of the Philippines, and living in a culture where a quiet nature draws extra attention and respect from her admirers. Ika is almost unrecognizable in this description when compared to her situation in the States, which includes poverty, anonymity, and general indifference to her personhood. The beginning of Ika's relationship with Russ is then founded on inequality since Russ takes Ika away from her support network and reputation, isolating her in a place where she has no resources that garner social capital for her individual and collective identity. This type of relationship—where one person has to give up a lot more of their resources in order to be with the other person—branches out to include a larger relationship

of inequality between Filipino and White (American) identity that frames the lives of Ika, Gabe, Tomas, and Russ.

Having left the Philippines, Ika and the boys are subjected to forms of colonization that threaten erasure of their Filipino identity while simultaneously promising them the benefit of assimilation into American society. As part of a treatment for Gabe's muteness, therapists recommend weaning him off of Tagalog as Tomas recounts, "It was decided that the family should try speaking only English. Now, Gabe and I could no longer speak the language, though we could understand it, but less well each year, like memories of old friends and places that fade no matter how hard you try to cling to them by going over them in your mind" (Roley, *Last Mistress* 27). The irony is unbearable here as American professionals condemn Tagalog to be the disease that is shackling Gabe to silence while prescribing an 'antidote' that effectively silences the voice of his Filipino heritage. Tomas' comparison of losing a voice to losing a person or place who is dear brings to life this severed connection and emphasizes the intimacy of this loss. Consequently, Russ' decision to take Ika away from the Philippines to the U.S. proves to be anything but an improvement to their lives as Ika loses her social standing and support network while her sons gradually lose their connection to their Filipino identity. This process reflects the frame of thought behind colonization, which Maria Root explains concerning the Spanish conquest of the Filipinos (here, represented by the tao, or "common person"). Root proposes that colonization "means transforming the tao, re-creating her in the image and likeness of the colonizer, or re-creating the European in the tao, so that tao and colonizer can gaze at each other as equals—even if only on European terms" (55). For Root, the only way for the colonized to attain respect from the colonizer is to remake themselves in the image of the colonizer, letting go of their own identities and seeing themselves through the eyes of their oppressors. Ika and the

boys follow this process to the letter, leaving the Philippines behind and adopting the language of a colonial nation. The relationship between Russ and the rest of the family is then plagued by this colonial framework that prevents the family from attaining truly equal footing between their White and Filipino backgrounds. To counter this unlevel playing field, Tomas pushes back against his father, who increasingly tries to keep Gabe and Tomas away from their mother since he is insensitive to the boys' struggles and unwilling to leave ample room for them to explore their Filipino identities.

The push and pull that comes to characterize the family culminates in outright animosity as Tomas and Gabe feel increasingly pressured to pick between their parents, which fully exposes the White-Filipino racial line and where the boys stand on the issue. In response to their father squandering the family's savings and abandoning Ika shortly after filing for bankruptcy, Tomas exercises his own independence by turning a cold shoulder towards his negligent father. As Tomas narrates, "I stopped returning his calls, and right away he began taking Gabe on our old outings … They went on road trips to Mexico, Santa Fe, a visit to family out in New York. Me, I would not even talk to family on his side. They were all New York Irish and Italians; I spent all my family time with the West Coast Filipinas eating sizzling adobo spooned onto steaming rice, crisp *lumpia*, and empanadas" (Roley, *Last Mistress* 23-24). A clean split develops between Tomas and his father, and race plays a large part in creating this distance between the father-son pair. Although he's disappointed with the individual failings of Russ, Tomas also recognizes Russ' position as a White male and the privileges that come with this position, which is something he pushes back against as he rejects the "New York Irish and Italians" in his family and chooses the "West Coast Filipinas" instead. While Tomas rejected his Whiteness in *American Son*, he never made such clear-cut decisions that made it known he was picking one

identity over the other. Here, Tomas leans towards his Filipino background as a way to openly retaliate against the absurd amount of power his White father holds and exercises. He is aware that the White position of his father enables him to look down on their mother, take her to the U.S., and then abandon her since she is financially dependent on Russ and powerless as a result.

By acknowledging the inherent inequality between his White and Filipino sides, Tomas understands that his multiple identities (represented by his parents) can't co-exist with such a huge power imbalance and promptly makes an ethical decision by siding with the identity that the U.S. has been threatening to erase for decades, which allows him to survive as a mixed-race individual. Tomas' extreme reaction to his father's behavior goes all the way back to *American Son*, as Kevin Escudero looks at Roley's first novel and offers an explanation on the necessity of Tomas' choice by elaborating, "While a significant challenge for multiracial individuals [is asserting] identities different from how their peers perceive them to be, exerting a non-dominant or non-mainstream identity can also be viewed as an act of exerting one's agency. This act of resistance to dominant categories by exerting multiple racial/ethnic identities in various circumstances is a right" (83). While racial identity is influenced by an individual's social environment, Escudero asserts that individuals also have some power in deciding how to identify, and they can exercise even more independence by selecting an identity that clashes with people's expectations. What's hinted at in *American Son* and becomes even more apparent in "Old Man" is that Russ clearly expects his White-Filipino sons to conform to American (White) standards, including leaving behind their home-country, forgetting Tagalog, and spending more time with their White father than with their Brown mother. Tomas' stance against his father isn't that extreme after all: he has to forcibly make space for his Filipino identity, which his father threatens to suffocate with his own expectations. Whiteness has been at the center of the family

narrative; thus, Tomas has to push his father away to escape this oppressive narrative. Maria Root describes this process as 'self-protection' as she explains, "Self-protection results in rejecting all that is perceived as part of the colonizer; mixed-heritage Filipinos are the physical embodiment of the Filipino's contact with the colonizer" (82). According to Root's stance, Tomas is located at a racial crossroads where two identities have come into contact with each other, and this uneven collision has prompted Tomas to reject the dominant identity in this relationship. Thus, Tomas delivers a punishing blow to his father when he tells him to leave Gabe's birthday party after Russ shows up uninvited. As Tomas exclaims, "Actually, if you don't mind using the back exit, I think that would be best … Mom put a lot of effort into this party. You're not going to ruin it" (Roley, *Last Mistress* 29). Although this stance may seem harsh, time and time again compromise within Tomas' family has always meant going along with the 'American way' and caving to the desires of the White father. From moving to the U.S. to giving up Tagalog, the White identity always trumps the Filipino identity in this family due to the unequal power relations that stem from the common colonial history of these two nations. Thus, Tomas understands that, at times, he can't make room for both identities; instead, he must solely embrace and assert his family identity just to preserve this part of him that the process of Americanization threatens to erase.

Roley dives deeper into the wounds that he introduces in *American Son* by presenting us with a more clear-cut picture of the beginning of Ika and Russ' relationship in *The Last Mistress*, drawing sharper racial lines as Tomas takes a stand and advocates for the family's Filipino side to counter the dominance of his father's White background. Although Tomas isn't necessarily denying his White background, he is pushing back against the power that his White identity holds—power that it gets from a socioeconomic structure that privileges White (American)

culture over Filipino culture. Tomas recognizes that, whenever the family leaves space for Whiteness, his family's Filipino identity is consistently subjugated beneath the weight of their White identity, and this power imbalance manifests itself in the family leaving the Philippines, ceasing to speak Tagalog, as well as the increasing pressure Russ puts on the kids to hang out with him because he thinks he has the right to demand their time while ignoring their mother's claim to them. All of these factors point to a deep-rooted tension that brings the family closer and closer to the American history of violence in the Philippines. These old tensions become more apparent as Roley shifts our attention away from Ika's family and towards her sister, Dina, and her own White-Filipino family, as they are unexpectedly forced to reconcile their existence with the violence and inequality that define Filipino-American history.

Positioning the Filipino Identity through Socioeconomic Disparity

Brian Ascalon Roley peels away some of the layers of ambiguity that typically characterize his writing, choosing to bring the violent colonial history of the Philippines to the forefront of his characters' consciousness in the form of Dina's brother, Pepe, an ex-Filipino-American soldier. Pepe straddles the line that forms the unsecure border between Filipino and American since he fought alongside U.S. soldiers in the Philippines and has now made his way to America to live with Dina. Although Pepe moves cleanly across boundaries, he can't escape the expectations that people heap on him as a result of his identity as a Filipino soldier. Because of his background, Pepe finds himself stuck in an inferior position as he is constantly doubted and mocked by those around him, including his loved ones. Roley then uses Pepe as a figure to solidify the inferior position of the Filipino within the racial hierarchy in America by presenting Pepe in a vulnerable socioeconomic position.

Pepe undermines traditional notions of masculinity by acting quiet and humble when he comes to America, which leads Dina's family to look down on him since they form masculine expectations based off his background as a Filipino soldier. Dina's kids especially take a disliking to Pepe because he constantly falls short of their already strong ideas of what masculinity is. While arguing with Dina about Pepe's background as a Filipino soldier during WWII, Becca, Dina's daughter, presses, "But if your brother was such a guerilla soldier, how come he's afraid of grown-up people in Los Angeles?" (Roley, *Last Mistress* 68). Dina's youngest child, Ben ("Twig"), also questions Pepe, going so far as to doubt his past as a soldier, claiming, "He doesn't seem like one. He seems so quiet" (Roley 66). The children seem to have this idea of the ideal man as one who is loud, who takes charge, and who isn't afraid to take up space. Yet Pepe frustrates these expectations since he remains a quiet figure who hardly matches the profile of the commanding ex-soldier that Becca and Ben have already created in their heads as a reference.

Although this disconnect between Pepe the quiet man and Pepe the military man is never directly addressed, Roley leaves hints that subtly unearth the power relations that influence Pepe's outlook and behavior. While looking through photos of Pepe's war days, Ben makes a peculiar observation when he asks, "Why are the Filipinos and the American soldiers wearing the same uniforms?" to which Dina weakly responds, "It had made sense then" (Roley, *Last Mistress* 67). Beneath Ben's straightforward question lies a complex web of relations that make it difficult for Ben to imagine Filipinos and Americans fighting on the same side. The racial wounds that Roley previously opened in *American Son* begin to creep back into the narrative as Roley inches closer and closer to discussing the disparities that stem from this military history. E.J.R. David offers some light on this history and the proceeding consequences for Filipinos as

he elaborates, “The continued presence of American soldiers in the Philippines to train Filipino soldiers sends the message that Filipinos lag behind the United States in terms of military skill, cannot adequately protect their country, and thus, are still dependent on the United States for protection” (44). The inherent inequality that arises out of the Philippines’ history as a U.S. colony frames Pepe’s position as a Filipino, establishing him as part of a country that the U.S. has imposed its will on and that the U.S. protects so long as it can benefit from its investment in the Philippines. There is nothing for Pepe to feel proud of as a soldier because he can’t even say that he fought for an independent, self-reliant army; instead, he and his Filipino comrades had to rely on U.S. military might to defend their country. Filipinos are passive—not proud—in this relationship because the U.S. always dictates the terms and conditions, even as they supposedly ‘defend’ the Philippines. However, the disparities between Filipinos and Americans (Whites) depend on more than just feelings of inferiority: these feelings stem from very real economic disparities that shape people’s perceptions of Filipinos, and these perceptions ultimately prevent Pepe from fitting into U.S. society.

Because of the role that economic status plays in shaping negative perceptions of Filipinos, Dina becomes extremely sensitive concerning Pepe’s position as a poor, unemployed Filipino American, which leads her to take actions that hurt Pepe even more since she unknowingly operates on an underlying belief in the ‘model minority’ perception of Asian Americans. Dina is unable to hide her bias against Pepe and the poverty she comes to associate with him since she nitpicks over his messy appearance, as Roley writes, “She noticed things about Pepe. How he left Seth’s motorcycle parts all over the carpet floor, an eyesore for the neighbors, as if they still lived in Manila. How he picked up her kids in those greasy old linen pants with the frayed cuffs—their teacher even called her one afternoon to make sure that the

man waiting outside for them was really her brother" (*Last Mistress* 71). Dina labels her brother as dirty and unclean, counting his "greasy" appearance as a strike against him and looking down on his messes that are an "eyesore" for her American neighbors. However, Dina also implicitly makes a connection between this perception of 'filthy' and the Philippines since she believes that this messiness is permitted in the Philippines ("as if they still lived in Manila") but not in the U.S. Tying his economic position with his Filipino identity, Dina then unknowingly rejects Pepe for who he is, which compels her to try and fundamentally change Pepe and the perception surrounding his circumstances.

Unwilling to admit to Pepe the shame that she feels because of his poor appearance, Dina feels that she must help Pepe assimilate and become an accepted member of U.S. society. These factors push Dina to take Pepe shopping while also complicating the trip, as Roley narrates, "[Pepe] smiled gently, trustfully, which made [Dina] cringe and blush: she did not tell him the real reason she wanted to buy him new clothes, that she wanted her husband's relatives to give him the respect he deserved" (*Last Mistress* 73). Dina's shame increases when she considers how her White in-laws will think of Pepe as inferior to them because of his lower economic status, which they may then conflate with his Filipino identity. This obsession with success and respect is something that Asian Americans have had to deal with for decades, and Jeffrey Santa Ana describes the mixed effects of accepting the ingredients for what has become the 'model minority' myth. As he explains, "The widespread belief that Asians are models of prosperity and scholastic achievement is a perception that many contemporary Asian-ancestry Americans have embraced for themselves, using and exploiting this perception as racialized capital to formulate and affirm their own sense of belonging" (24). While Asian Americans have used the model minority myth to assimilate into American society, there are consequences for Asian Americans

who fall short of these expectations and are unable to fulfill this image of success. Pepe fails to live up to this standard, earning the wrath and contempt of Dina's White in-laws since they find it difficult to accept those who lie outside of the mainstream narrative of American success.

Roley forces readers to confront the major economic differences that characterize the U.S.-Philippines relationship as Dina and Pepe are subjected to assumptions made by their White/American counterparts because of their Filipino identity. When Dina hosts her husband's brother and sister in-law, Dina immediately finds herself defending her brother for staying home and caring for their mother. Unfortunately, the doubt that Dina feels about her own position leaks into her thoughts as she sees through her in-law's polite façade and imagines her saying, "*Your relatives are leeching off you and your husband. This is America, not the Philippines. But I guess it's none of my business if Seth doesn't feel like he's being taken advantage of by a brother-in-law who could be out there in the world, trying to find decent work*" (Roley, *Last Mistress* 74). Reading the mind of Judith, Seth's in-law, Dina must face the dichotomy between the Philippines and the U.S. that stems from economic position. Judith (in Dina's mind) clearly looks down on Pepe staying with their family, calling this "leeching" by someone who has "taken advantage" of his situation. She then draws the line between the U.S. and the Philippines ("This is America, not the Philippines"), claiming that such vulnerable relationships of dependence and exploitation only occur in the Philippines as opposed to the U.S. Not only does Judith bring attention to the lower economic position of Pepe, but she blames him as well for his position by depicting him as an exploitative, lazy person who needs to work to pull himself out of this financial hole.

Behind this tense moment lies a rich layer of irony, considering the U.S.' exploitation of the Philippines by economically subjecting it to an abusive relationship. Rick Baldoz documents

a pattern of abuse long after the U.S. granted the Philippines independence since it also imposed on the Philippines the Rescission Act of 1946, which maintained an unequal economic relationship between the two countries. As Baldoz relates, “These laws downgraded the status of Filipino servicepersons, placing them in a separate administrative classification from that of other U.S. soldiers. As the statute’s title implies, the legislation *rescinded* previously allocated appropriations related to war spending, including disbursements for veterans” (231). The separation of Filipino and U.S. soldiers into two classes reveals the tremendous amount of power that the U.S. already holds since it has the privilege of determining these classifications without fearing any consequences. Whatever kind of bond or alliance existed between Filipino and U.S. soldiers during WWII is undermined by this abuse of power that makes it seem as if Filipinos were on a different side to begin with. To make matters worse, Filipinos were not only treated as different by this act but were also established as inferior since they were paid far less than their American counterparts. The act prevented Filipino veterans from attaining their fair share of military benefits, as Baldoz explains, “Filipinos veterans could only receive benefits at a ratio of one peso per dollar. This rate of compensation represented a sizeable disparity in payouts, since the U.S. government had artificially set the value of the peso at fifty American cents on the dollar, meaning that they were eligible for only half the allowances paid to other veterans” (231-32). Baldoz lays out for us the inferior position of the Filipino soldier that is determined by monetary value and clearly places the Filipino beneath the American soldier. The United States intentionally undermined Filipinos’ ability to compete in the global market, denying them the monetary boost they needed to jumpstart their post-WWII lives and economically setting them behind their American (White) peers. Unable to retaliate against these abusive policies, Filipinos are left with a sense of helplessness that only exacerbates feelings of inferiority and shame.

Connecting this unbalanced economic relationship to the biases of Roley's characters, we come to view Pepe's vulnerable position as the product of U.S. policies designed to cripple Filipinos' economic capabilities; yet, Pepe is blamed for his position, and Dina's White relatives simply look down on him because they view him as a failure, trapping Pepe in a cycle of shame that he never created and may never escape.

When we resituate the quiet, passive figure of Pepe within the history of U.S. colonization of the Philippines, we discover an unequal power dynamic that has resulted in an abusive economic relationship and has produced a lasting sense of shame for Filipinos since they lack true independence from their American (White) oppressors. Pepe may have served as a soldier and may appear to have mobility in his move from the Philippines to the U.S., but he is still unable to escape his vulnerable position within the global economy as a poor Filipino male and the stigmas surrounding this position. Consequently, people conflate Pepe's economic position with his identity, linking his Filipino identity with poverty, servitude, and weakness. Pepe is then placed in a humiliating position as he tries to find his place in a nation that has subjugated his country, tainted his identity, and left him to clean up the mess that it created. This problem of trying to live in harmony with one's oppressor haunts the family's younger generation as the colonial history that defined Pepe's life is inherited by Dina's kids, who drift further away from their Filipino identity as they learn to live with the U.S. colonial ideology that places upon them a sense of inferiority.

Celebrating Filipino Identity and the Details this Approach Misses

Having placed the White-Filipino relationship within the context of colonialism and economic inequality, Roley then sets the stage for the younger members of Dina's family as her children must grapple with their White-Filipino identity and the contradiction that emerges from

the intimate yet abusive relationship between the United States and the Philippines. Haunted by the lasting impact of U.S. colonization of the Philippines, Dina's children face extreme backlash as they endure moments of blatant racism that translate into feelings of confusion and self-hate since they receive negative messages about their Filipino identity. The children are then forced into a state of uncertainty as they reject their Filipino identity and attempt to find another identity that they can be proud of. By depicting the struggle of Dina's White-Filipino children and their inability to fully embrace their Filipino identity, Roley exposes the consequences of championing a multicultural/-racial society without acknowledging the power differences that have established these racial positions in the first place.

With the arrival of a new maid, Risa, and her daughter, Teresa, Dina's children—Matt, Becca, and Ben—are pushed to explore what it means to be Filipino in America when 'Filipino' carries such negative connotations, and the children's inability to cope with this reality pushes them further and further away from their Filipino identity. Becca takes the brunt of anti-Filipino sentiment from her friends and peers as "a new Hong Kong girl" mockingly retorts upon discovering Becca's Filipino identity, "Oh, yes, we get a lot of cheap Filipino laborers in Hong Kong, because local workers are so expensive"; adding salt to the wound, another classmate refers to Becca as a "Filipina barwhorelovechildmonkey" (Roley, *Last Mistress* 83). Roley brings the larger context of colonial abuse and economic exploitation into the personal life of Becca as she is slammed by assumptions that arise out of the history of the U.S. robbing the Philippines of its resources, compelling the country to make commodities out of its own people, especially its women, to generate new sources of income. Neferti Tadiar describes the consequences of commodifying Filipinas and affirms the symbol of the prostitute as "a pervasive figure of the 'whoredom' that is the Philippines—the further debasement of an already debased,

that is, feminized nation: 'an economy raped and ravaged by foreign powers'" (128). For Tadiar, the Philippines is a punching bag for the U.S. and other international powers, a country that has not only been abused but continues to be mocked since its abusers know it cannot fight back. The attitude of submissiveness that stems from this vulnerable position permeates the jobs that poor Filipinas are forced to take abroad, from sex workers to domestic workers. When Becca realizes that this is how non-Filipinos view her—a possible product of an unequal relationship between some soldier and a Filipina sex worker at a bar (referring to the "barwhorelovechildmonkey" label)—she immediately turns away from her Filipino identity.

Becca and her siblings start to reject their Filipino identity as they find nothing to be proud of, choosing other colonial identities that carry connotations of respect and power. In response to her classmates teasing her, Becca reaches out to claim other identities, which Ben takes note of, observing, "Becca told our classmates that it was *wrong* for anyone to lump all Filipinos together. She always pointed to the fact that our great-great-granduncle was a famous poet and martyr, who had also been a surgeon in Europe, and that her round eyes came from Spanish blood" (*Last Mistress* 83). Although Becca tries to push back against the anti-Filipino sentiment of her classmates, she does so by mixing in a colonizer's identity with her Filipino identity, pointing out her European and Spanish heritage. Becca is unable to claim her Filipino identity on its own due to the negative connotations that taint it, so she must call another, more powerful identity her own to salvage some respect from her peers. This belief—that being Filipino alone is not enough to earn the respect of others and is, in fact, looked down on—transforms into a self-hate that leads Dina's children to deny their Filipino heritage altogether in search of identities they can be proud of. Matt in particular decides to reject his Filipino identity when he finds White friends at his school, as Ben laments, "Lately, ever since transferring to Westwind and

finding Jewish friends there, he discarded his surfboards and bleached hair and now went to synagogue with them and always spoke about moving to New York" (Roley, *Last Mistress* 87). Lacking a solid identity and a proud tradition to hold onto, Matt easily lets go of his Filipino identity and adopts the identity of his (White) Jewish friends, as if behaving like them will make him one of them.

While Matt's behavior comes across as odd to his family, this move to adopt the identity of an other—especially an historically more powerful other—is a common one that E.J.R. David documents. As David explains, "Because of the inferior connotations the colonial society has attached to their cultural and ethnic identities, the colonized might develop an intense desire to rid oneself of such identities and try to emulate the colonizer as much as possible" (56). For David, members of a colonized group will not only abandon their own collective identity but will jump onto the bandwagon of the colonizer since they receive clear messages of what is 'good' and what is 'bad.' This undermining of the colonized (Filipino) identity and reinforcement of the colonizer (White) identity pushes the colonized to see themselves as extensions of their colonizers, and they gladly imagine that there is some positive connection between them and their colonizers if they simply adopt their colonizer's identity. Having nothing to hold onto and feeling the impact of White superiority, Dina's children seamlessly drift away from their Filipino identity, adopting the identities of their colonizers to avoid feeling the powerlessness that comes with being Filipino. In contrast to the submissive attitude that Dina's children display in the face of anti-Filipino sentiment, the daughter of Dina's maid, Teresa, surprisingly exhibits the strongest pushback as she refuses to accept the connotations of her socioeconomic position.

Because of her time spent in the Philippines, Teresa feels more of a connection with her Filipino identity and carries more background knowledge about the nation's role in U.S. history,

allowing her to resist simple caricatures that threaten to replace the complex history of the Philippines. Upon arriving in the U.S. and entering Matt's school, Teresa is outraged at the erasure of the Philippines from the U.S. education system. As Ben narrates, "She assumed that a special, benevolent relationship existed between the Filipinos and their former colonizers ('Our older brothers,' her *titos* had called the Americans they fought with against the Japanese'). She felt like an idiot. There was actually this whole huge country over there that the Americans had fashioned after themselves, where everybody assumed Americans still thought about them" (Roley, *Last Mistress* 90). Teresa is able to diagnose that Filipino identity itself isn't truly 'Filipino' since it has been constructed by Americans in an attempt to mold Filipinos into the perfect American subjects. As a result, Filipinos have been conditioned to look up to Americans, preserving the racial hierarchy that the U.S. created during its colonization of the Philippines while keeping Filipinos unaware of this development. Teresa has every right to be outraged because the U.S.—a country that Filipinos mistakenly trust—is duping Filipinos by keeping them ignorant of their position in the global order: a position that is not even worth mentioning in a U.S. history class. In response to this invisibility, Teresa vehemently pushes back against the stereotypes during the few times when Filipinos *are* visible, despising her mother for consenting to serve as a maid to Dina. Ben observes this rebellious attitude when he notes, "On several occasions when Inay criticized Risa for some mistake, or sighed impatiently while explaining some chore, I noticed Teresa angrily walk away. One time she slammed a door. Risa followed Teresa and told her to be more polite, but Teresa looked at her mother condescendingly, then wordlessly went to her reading spot in our yard" (Roley, *Last Mistress* 89). As Roley emphasizes once again, Filipinos are most noticeable on an international level when they arrive in low socioeconomic positions, such as a domestic worker—a trend that erases the rest of the Filipino

identity in favor of a stereotype and that earns the fury of Teresa, who cannot accept being tied to such a humiliating position. Teresa stands as the first character in Roley's novel who actively resists the socioeconomic connotations of being Filipino without rejecting her Filipino identity. However, this approach of trying to maintain one's Filipino-ness while rejecting the Filipino position becomes problematic as Dina's White-Filipino children attempt this same approach, which yields mixed results.

Influenced by Teresa's determination to resist colonial views of the Philippines, Dina's oldest son, Matt, asserts his own claim to a Filipino identity; however, in order to feel proud of this act, Matt ends up creating an idealized version of the Philippines that leaves no room for his multiracial identity to exist. Matt embraces the strong and militant attitude that Teresa exhibits in her resistance to the inferiority complex imposed on Filipinos, but he does so by drawing a sharp line between White and Filipino identities that alienates his own mixed identity. While pressing Dina about visiting the Philippines, Dina fiercely refuses the idea and argues that Matt would never fit in with the locals because "[t]hey aren't Americans like [him.]" Matt responds, "Excuse me, but I'm not American," to which Dina then retorts, "You could have fooled me," and Matt fiercely replies, "Try telling that to all the white kids who teased me about being an Asian in elementary school" (Roley, *Last Mistress* 95). Desperately searching for a sense of pride in being Filipino, Matt comes to the conclusion that he must deny any trace of Americanness and Whiteness in him because of the grossly unequal power dynamic that enables Whites to look down on Filipinos. Matt cannot shake the colonial history that the White-Philippine relationship is grounded in because Dina herself often demeans the Philippines as her defense for not returning. Downplaying the wealth of her family's land in the Philippines, Dina claims, "We are talking about the Philippines, Matt—that's hardly like owning a piece of Tuscany or southern

France," to which Matt counters, "You know, that sounds like something a colonial would say … To say that a piece of Europe is more important than a piece of the Philippines. Actually, Teresa says the farm is beautiful, that it has mountains and valleys and beaches as blue and as clear as Hawaii" (Roley, *Last Mistress* 94-5). Matt immediately recognizes the White supremacist framework behind valuing European land over Filipino land, asserting a positive view of the Philippines by latching onto the image of beauty that Teresa describes for him. However, Teresa's narrative becomes a problem in itself, considering the unrealistic picture it presents when Roley reminds us of the economic disparity between the U.S. and the Philippines.

Although Matt's pursuit of a proud Filipino identity is sincere, he buys into a narrative that is riddled with holes since it ignores the economic consequences of colonialism that define the Filipino identity to this day. Ben points out the flaws in Matt's optimistic conception of the Philippines as he reflects, "But now I asked myself why if Teresa loved it so much there, she and Risa wanted to live in the U.S., and I suspected she was telling Matt what he wanted to hear" (Roley, *Last Mistress* 94). Ben reminds readers of the fact that Teresa and her mother were compelled to leave the Philippines in the first place, which suggests that the pair may have been running from something and delivers a punishing blow to Teresa's uplifting narrative of the Philippines since there's no reason for her to leave the beautiful land she describes. This simple observation exposes larger blind spots in Matt's vision and how he fundamentally views the problem, which becomes more about uplifting the Filipino identity for him. To achieve this, Matt must create a narrower Filipino identity that blocks out the disparaging history of colonization that is very much a part of Filipino identity and especially Filipino American identity. It then becomes impossible for Matt to accept the reality of colonization while simultaneously trying to create a proud Filipino heritage that ignores this dehumanizing process, which prevents Matt

from creating a pure Filipino identity that remains untouched by outside influences. Maria Root acknowledges the shortcomings of approaching Filipino identity through the lens of solid racial lines since the meaning of 'Filipino' itself is thoroughly founded on colonial developments. Root pushes for a more multifaceted approach as she explains, "The Filipino struggle with identity bears much resemblance to the process of working out a mixed racial identity, particularly when one group is oppressed or subjugated by the other … Contemporarily, multiethnic and multiracial paradigms are emerging that fit the Filipino American experience better" (Root 88). Applying Root's thoughts to the dilemma of Roley's characters, we cannot think of the Filipino identity as comprising a single entity since colonial powers have mixed so thoroughly with Filipino identity that it becomes impossible to talk about the Philippines without talking about colonial powers like the U.S. Thus, it becomes necessary for us to discuss the role of the U.S. in shaping Filipino identity, which inevitably leads to discussing the U.S. imposing its culture on the Philippines and stripping it of its economic resources. A multiracial approach is essential for addressing Filipino/Filipino American history, but this approach is only successful if it confronts the power dynamics that define Filipino identity in relation to the U.S. and other colonizers.

Roley starts where he left off in *American Son*, immersing us in the racial turmoil of Ika's family and branching out to Dina's family in order to more thoroughly explore how the effects of U.S. colonization in the Philippines haunt the White-Filipino identity since Ika's and Dina's children are unable to accept the violent past that continues to define their existence. As Roley reveals, it is impossible to talk about Filipino history and Filipino American identity without navigating the power dynamics that the U.S. imposed on the Philippines, which resulted in a Filipino identity that is defined by its cultural and economic inferiority to Whiteness. Roley then captures the predicament that his White-Filipino characters face as they attempt to make space

for a Filipino identity that is tainted by violence and subjugation. Although Roley's characters desperately want to know themselves and be seen by others, representation alone fails to level the playing field between their White and Filipino identities since merely acknowledging difference without acknowledging the violence that caused this difference teaches White-Filipino Americans nothing about their heritage. This leads me to my final section, which deals with the belief in a post-racial America and the strain of multiculturalism that is tied to this ideology. While American multiculturalism allows Filipinos to claim their identity, it does nothing to change the power dynamics that frame the unequal relationship between Whites and Filipinos. This is about more than simply feeling less; this is about actually *being* less in a global economy that enables groups of people to dehumanize others. Once Filipino Americans—especially White-Filipino Americans—understand this, not only can they work towards being seen but they can work towards being seen on their own terms and effecting more concrete change.

The Problem with Multiculturalism and a Post-Racial America

The question of whether or not the U.S. has moved past racial conflict continues to be a major debate point and has led some people to conclude that we are now living in a post-racial society, citing the multicultural movement in America as evidence of this reality. In fact, multiculturalism grew out of efforts to combat the very notions of colorblindness and racial transcendence that fuel the belief in a post-racial America today. Although multiculturalism has won Filipino Americans more visibility, this visibility has produced harmless shows of cultural identity that do nothing to challenge the power structure that still values Whites at the top of the racial hierarchy. Proponents of multiculturalism may mean well, but multiculturalism has become a way to overemphasize representation and ignore the structures that continue to keep Filipinos beneath Whites; thus, only when we face the violent past of U.S.-Philippine relations

can we truly close the distance between White and Filipino identities and move towards creating a society where different peoples have the power to respect themselves and others.

Multiculturalism started off as a way to resist colorblindness and racial inequality by placing the spotlight on race, which ironically led to an overemphasis on representation. Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield analyze the beginnings of American multiculturalism in the 1970s and 80s, noting the supposed racial awakening it was supposed to produce as they explain, "Multiculturalism, to the contrary, implied that race is everywhere … If you were led to assume that American culture would be better if color-blind, then multiculturalism shocked you by showing that color consciousness *is* American culture" (3). Gordon and Newfield observe the biggest component of the multicultural movement to be visibility—ensuring that Americans see race at all levels of society, both on a national policy level and on a more personal level. Proponents of multiculturalism sought to ensure that Americans couldn't simply ignore race as a factor that shapes people's lives and, thus, ignore their role in effecting structural change for themselves and others. It's understandable then that multiculturalism's supporters tried to make the issue as intimate as possible for people, as Gordon and Newfield relay, "If you thought race was a function of economics, multiculturalism told you race is also central to your personal identity" (3). The logic here is to bring racial issues into the homes and personal lives of people in order to increase awareness and pressure people to acknowledge their racial positions. It makes sense that racial issues can only be addressed if people are constantly being told to think about race and how it shapes their everyday lives. However, multiculturalism's proponents ended up going too far in this approach, adding importance to *seeing* racial differences without encouraging people to uncover the deeper historical processes and factors that have led to these differences.

The reason multiculturalism is so effective in combatting racial equality today is because it conflates representation with racial equality, placing the spotlight on cultural identity while ignoring the structures that shape these identities. Gordon and Newfield acknowledge major shortcomings in the vision that multiculturalism presents as they admit, "[Multiculturalism] allowed 'culture''s aura of free play to attribute a creative power to racial groups that lacked political and economic power. It was propelled by culture's traditional belief in its ability to transcend social forces such as racial discrimination or class antagonism" (3). In other words, multiculturalism places the spotlight on overlooked groups in the belief that equality means putting one's identity on display for the world to see, just as more dominant groups have been able to do. This approach offers shallow praise for differences and attempts to combat racism by arguing that diversity itself is a good thing. However, this effort misses the point: the problem isn't difference itself but what it reflects: being subjected to processes that have led to different outcomes for different groups of people. Gordon and Newfield bring this charge against multiculturalism as they claim, "Cultural diversity noted differences in values and outlooks while ignoring the differences in social position that influence those values" (7). This inattention to the historical processes and resulting structures that have produced the racial differences we see today becomes crucial when considering White-Filipino American identity and the tensions that can arise out of this existence. While multiculturalism might celebrate White-Filipino Americans as symbols of diversity, the history of genocide and oppression inflicted by the U.S. against the Philippines undercuts the positive façade of diversity and pushes us to explore the complex processes that continue to shape the White-Filipino American identity.

The atmosphere surrounding multiculturalism changes when we consider the history of violence inflicted by the U.S. against the Philippines, grounding (White-) Filipino American

identity in physical and cultural genocide. Dylan Rodríguez doesn't shy away from this darker side of Filipino American identity formation, and the history of U.S. colonization is something that remains for Rodríguez as he asserts, "The era of U.S. mass killing and ecological devastation in the archipelago is often constructed as an *episode* in the long history of Filipino/American, Philippine/U.S. relations … The *violence* of this encounter with American modernity intersects as it shapes time, subjectivity, and the collective life of the social" ("Filipino Americanism" 38). Rodríguez refuses to dismiss the violent oppression of the Philippines as a time period confined to the Philippine-American War (1899-1902); instead, he sees the impact of U.S. colonization reverberating into the present, continuing to frame relationships and shape individual identities. The White-Filipino relationship that exists today evolved out of the violence of the initial encounter between the U.S. and the Philippines, binding the past to the present in an unbreakable relationship. Rodríguez reaffirms this bond between past violence and present Filipino American identity as he declares, "I understand the Filipino condition as a lived structure of inescapability from multiple epochal violences—white supremacist colonization, genocide, and modernist nation building" (*Suspended Apocalypse* 26). For Rodríguez, genocide is so thoroughly tied into the development of the current Filipino American identity that it is an essential part of Filipino American identity. The sobering reality is that Filipino American identity *is* defined by genocide and White violence, and these developments can't be ignored or erased from Filipino history. Rodríguez describes this genocide as "cultural and historical loss—a structured erasure and distortion of indigenous identities and identifications under the regimes of Spanish and American colonialism, which encompass accelerated and irreparable physical and ecological obliteration as the historical premises for the cultural and political forms of the colonizer's incipient 'civil society'" (*Suspended Apocalypse* 26). Rodríguez shows that, in order to construct an acceptable

'Filipino' identity to work with, the U.S. had to continue the process of suppressing local cultures, stripping locals of power, and erasing memories of the past—all while plaguing the land with war and physical damage that wore down resistance to U.S. influence. The current strain of American multiculturalism is far too inadequate for addressing the structural inequalities that result from this history of U.S. genocide and violence against the Philippines, so we need a new approach to understanding how to navigate White-Filipino American identity in a way that challenges the unequal power dynamics of the White-Filipino relationship.

In place of multiculturalism's shallow celebration of diversity, we must develop a new strain of multiculturalism that acknowledges White violence against Filipinos so that people can begin to work toward enacting structural equality between these identities moving forward. The irony of the current form of multiculturalism is that it imposes its own rules for how Filipinos can express their Filipino identity. Vijay Prashad makes note of this stark reality in his book *The Karma of Brown Folk* as he observes, "Each cultural community is accorded the right to determine its destiny, as long as it does not clash in some fundamental way with the social contract of the state and its citizens" (111). Although Filipino Americans have some say in asserting their Filipino identity, the ways in which they proclaim their Filipino-ness is determined by Whites since Whites still dominate societal institutions. This thought exposes the underlying power structures that still organize the racial dynamic of our society even as some institutions may include 'diversity' and 'inclusion' as their founding pillars. In his book *Suspended Apocalypse*, Rodríguez similarly discusses the power relations lurking beneath the guise of 'diversity and inclusion' by analyzing an event called "Pilipino Culture Night" (PCN) at UC Berkeley. Rodríguez rails against this kind of cultural celebration as he asserts, "The PCN invariably sustains a troubled relation to the racist and white supremacist institutionalities of U.S.

universities and colleges, thus amounting to a vexed collective endeavor that makes use of the institutional forms of hegemonic multiculturalism while generally withdrawing from a present-tense critique of white supremacy" (13). Rodríguez uses the university setting as a perfect example of how Filipino identity is allowed into the spotlight while still being restricted by White authority since Whites regulate how identity is expressed. The performance that Rodríguez refers to is a Filipino warrior performance, something that focuses on the past and implies that being Filipino means being able to identify with this past identity. Rodríguez rightly points out that critiques of the present are conveniently forgotten as Filipino Americans are satisfied with holding the spotlight without holding any real power.

To counter this pacifying effect of American multiculturalism, Filipino Americans should push for critiques of the present and education initiatives that reveal to people the concrete ways in which Filipinos have been and continue to be subjected to U.S. power. White-Filipino Americans such as Roley's characters have felt the effects of these power differences caused by the economic disparities that have tied Filipino identity to poverty and led to degrading views of Filipino Americans. Pushing back against negative perceptions by solely creating cultural celebrations is not enough to effect change because what lies at the heart of the matter is the history of colonization and subsequent socioeconomic disparities that have produced these biases. Thus, Filipino Americans need to fight for the space to tell these narratives in order to push back against White views and institutions while shifting their attention away from celebrating ideas of some past Filipino identity. Roley's White-Filipino American characters have already chased after a Filipino identity that they can proudly assert to complete their multiracial heritage, but Filipino American identity will always be haunted by the impact of U.S. genocide and cultural oppression. Filipino Americans, especially White-Filipino Americans,

don’t have to let go of their Filipino identity, but trying to celebrate this identity misses the point of addressing the history of violence that plagues White-Filipino relations. By recognizing the history of violence inflicted by the U.S. against Filipinos and Filipino Americans and addressing the resulting economic and structural disparities between Whites and Filipinos, we can begin to create a new form of multiculturalism—one that provides a holistic view of Filipino identity and confronts the wounds that the U.S. inflicted on the Philippines and that still bleed to this day. Only then can we envision a multicultural society that not only supports diversity but structural equality so that representation and equality can co-exist, which will allow White-Filipino Americans to accept both of their racial identities and feel comfortable with their multiracial identity.

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